



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release May 23, 1988

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U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE EXAMINES RESULTS OF WATERFOWL LAW ENFORCEMENT EFFORT

A special wildlife law enforcement squad issued over 1,100 citations for illegal hunting during the past waterfowl hunting season, Frank Dunkle, of the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, announced today. The task force included 29 Service special agents and 25 state law enforcement agents from across the country on temporary assignment to waterfowl hunting hot spots, particularly in the waterfowl wintering grounds.

Dunkle ordered the special emphasis on enforcement of waterfowl hunting regulations last fall in response to increasing concern over the impact of illegal baiting and overharvest on duck populations. Duck numbers are near record lows because of an extended drought in many duck-producing areas of the United States and Canada and continued habitat destruction throughout the continent.

Overall, almost 4,500 citations were issued by Service special agents for violations of waterfowl hunting regulations during the 1987-88 season. This does not include citations issued by state wildlife enforcement personnel or those issued on national wildlife refuges.

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The vast majority of the citations were written for shooting over bait or over limit. Baiting is the spreading of grain or other food to attract birds to a shooting site and often leads to over limits. In one case, three hunters were caught with a total of 168 ducks. Another single hunter was found with 53 birds in his blind.

Other common violations included hunting without a license or Federal Duck Stamp, shooting lead shot in a steel shot zone, or using a shotgun without a plug in the magazine.

After reviewing the results of the special task force effort, Dunkle said, "I am dismayed that some individuals continue to blatantly disregard hunting regulations--at any time, but especially now when duck populations are low."

"This special law enforcement effort has let illegal waterfowl hunters know we are serious about protecting this Nation's waterfowl resources," Dunkle said. "I can assure them we will use these techniques again next fall."

"Unfortunately, this is one of those situations in which the few can ruin it for the many. This illegal activity in no way reflects adversely on the many waterfowl hunters who conduct their hunts in strict accord with established regulations."

As part of their investigations, officers turned up some rather elaborate means of circumventing the law. One agent, posing as a guest to hunt on an exclusive club in California, soon learned many hunters were using portable two-way radios. If a message were broadcast saying "Dan's wife is at the clubhouse," that meant the game warden was there. At another club, hunters would go out for a morning shoot over a baited area--virtually assured of at least a daily limit of birds. They would then return to the clubhouse, refrigerate the morning bag, change into different clothes, and head back to the blinds for an afternoon shoot and yet another limit--or more--of birds.

"Violations such as those uncovered in this enforcement effort show a disregard of outdoor ethics," Dunkle said. "I am urging Service personnel and state wildlife agencies, as well as the hunters in the marshes, to help us catch illegal hunters and prosecute them to the fullest extent of the law."